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Governor George Burrington,

.. of the ..



Colony of North Carolina.



GOVERNOR

WITH AN

ACCOUNT OF HIS OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATIONS

IN THE

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1724—1725,
1731—1734.

BY

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RALEIGH, N. C.:
EDWARDS & BROUGHTON, PRINTERS AND BINDERS.
1896.

“His virtues were his own, and his vices were but too common in the times in which he lived.”

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

This brief narration of a remarkable career may not be devoid of interest to North Carolinians and students of colonial history in general. In it, I have sought to gather such information as could be found in the official records, and elsewhere, concerning GOVERNOR BURRINGTON. His life, character, services to the province, and the true circumstances of his mysterious death have never before been set forth in the form of a separate sketch.

M. DEL. H.

RALEIGH, N. C., *September, 1896.*



Burrington.

GOVERNOR BURRINGTON.

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HIS OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATIONS IN THE COLONY OF NORTH CAROLINA.

GEORGE BURRINGTON, twice Governor of North Carolina,—first for the Lords Proprietors and then under the King—was an Englishman by birth and hailed from a locality which, long before his day, had been most prolific of the bold spirits whose names are so closely linked with the exploration and settlement of the New World. To quote the language of a gifted novelist, “It was the men of DEVON, the Drakes and Hawkins, Gilberts and Raleighs, Grenvilles and Oxenham, and a host more of ‘forgotten worthies’, whom we shall learn one day to honor as they deserve, to whom England owes her commerce, her colonies, her very existence.”* In common with England, North Carolina has already learned to honor the greatest of these worthies, and the State Capital stands as a lasting memorial of her gratitude to Sir Walter Raleigh, under whose patronage the first English settlement in America was made, in 1584.

It was about a century after the colonists, sent out by Raleigh, had mysteriously disappeared, and when their fortress on the coast of Carolina was a deserted ruin, that Burrington first saw the light. The exact place and date of his birth have not been ascertained; but as he was a resident of Devon, when appointed, and came

* Charles Kingsley, “Westward Ho!”

of Devonshire ancestry, the presumption is that he was a native of that county. As to the time, it must have been as early as 1685, for if Burrington's service in England commenced, (as he said it did), during the reign of King William, which ended in 1702, the difference between those dates would make him seventeen years old at the beginning of such service, even if he was not born at an earlier period than that estimated, as may well have been the case. If only seventeen, his first employment was doubtless in a military capacity; and, according to the above conjecture, as to age, he was about thirty-five or forty when he came to America, in 1724.

The Burrington family was seated at Ideford, in the parish of Chudleigh, Devon, about the beginning of the seventeenth century, if not earlier, and is mentioned in the herald's visitation for 1620. From Mr. Arthur A. Burrington, a present member of the family who resides near Hampton Wick, in Middlesex, England, the writer learns that Governor Burrington was a son of GILBERT BURRINGTON. But, as there were several members of the family at different times, who bore that name, a patient research has, thus far, failed to clearly distinguish them. One of these was Gilbert Burrington of Jewes-Hollecombe, in the parish of Crediton, a gentleman of some note, who inherited several manorial estates in the adjoining county of Cornwall, from his kinsman, Thomas Burrington of Sandford, in 1657. A second Thomas Burrington, who was the son of this Gilbert, served under King William in the Low Countries and made his will at the memorable siege of Namur, in 1695, whereby it was agreed with a brother officer that, should either be slain, the survivor was to receive the tents, pistols,

and other military equipages, left by the deceased in Flanders. There were several other members of the family who rendered service to the Whig cause and also appear to have been sons of Gilbert. One of these, Major Charles Burrington, is accredited by English historians^a with having been the first gentleman who adhered to William the Third—then Prince of Orange—when Great Britain was invaded at the beginning of the Revolution of 1688.* Another, John Burrington, was Member of Parliament from Oakhampton, Devon, and Commissioner in the Vitualling Office, or Commissary.

In Williamson's History of North Carolina, cited hereafter, it is stated that George Burrington received his appointment as an acknowledgement of some service rendered by his father to George the First, at the time of that monarch's accession. If this be true, the Governor was not a son of the Gilbert Burrington, to whom we have referred, for that gentleman died prior to 1696, and King George ascended the throne in 1715. It is possible, however, that the historian confused the services of the family, and supposed that the debt of gratitude was due Burrington's father individually. Or, it may be that the parent in question was a Gilbert Burrington, the younger, of Jewes-Hollecombe. There was a Captain Gilbert Burrington, of the Royal Navy, but he died about 1702. In any event, it is of little importance whether these gentlemen belonged to the Governor's immediate family, or whether they were more distantly related. And whether other members of the connection, than those already mentioned, were adhe-

*Sir James Mackintosh's History of the Revolution of 1688, ch. xv; Hume's History of England. ch. lxxi; Macaulay's History of England, ch. ix; etc., etc.

rents of the House of Orange is difficult to learn; though it is by no means improbable that Governor Burrington, himself, was in the army at a later period, as he was often referred to as Captain Burrington, and it will be seen hereafter that, in writing of his family's loyalty, he boasted of having served the Crown in every reign after the abdication of King James.

It may also be of interest to note, ere proceeding with our narrative, that, in the seventeenth century, there was an American family of Burrington, in the colony of Rhode Island;* but, whether it was descended from the Burrington's of Devon, does not appear.

And now, confining this sketch to the colonial career of our subject,—about which there is no uncertainty—we learn from the Royal Council Journals that on February 26th, 1723, King George the First signified his approbation of the appointment, by the Lords Proprietors, of GEORGE BURRINGTON, of Devonshire, Great Britain, as Governor of their Province of North Carolina, in America. The latter was thereupon required to give bond for the faithful discharge of the duties of said office, which he did, with Nicholas Vincent, of Truro, in Cornwall, and Dennis Bond, of Grange, in Dorsetshire, as his sureties.† As early as the 29th of May, 1723, before leaving England, he joined Chief Justice Gale, and Secretary Lovick, in securing a lease of the fisheries of the Colony.‡ This conveyance, signed by the Lords Proprietors and stamped with their armorial seals, is now framed and preserved in the State Library, at Raleigh, North Carolina.

* See Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island, by John Osborne Austin, p. 33; also Colonial Records of Rhode Island.

† Colonial Records of North Carolina, Vol. II, p. 480, 481.

‡ Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II, p. 490.

On the 3rd of June, 1723, the Proprietors sent a communication to the members of the Council and of the House of Assembly, in Carolina, advising them of Burrington's appointment and commending the new Governor to their good offices as a gentleman of whose inclinations to their service, and hearty desire for the welfare of the Colony, in general, their Lordships were well convinced. At the same time, Edward Moseley, Surveyor General, was directed to apportion, in fee simple, for his use, two thousand acres of land.*

From the Journal of a Council, held at Edenton, the capital of the Colony, on the 15th of January, 1724, it appears that Burrington presented himself before the Board, and exhibited the credentials, whereby he was, "Commissionated and appointed Governor General and Admiral of the Province." He was accordingly sworn in, and at once assumed his executive functions.†

From the outset of his administration, the Governor encountered opposition to his proper authority, as well as arbitrary demands. When an official order was sent by him to William Reed, his predecessor as Chief Executive (President of the Council, *ad interim*), the latter became so indignant, at being deprived of the government, that he returned the communication, with comments not altogether refined, for which he was indicted.‡ He was also known to state, upon alleged hearsay, that Burrington had been in prison, before leaving England, for beating an old woman. Historians, in later years, have given the old woman incident as a fact, but cite no authorities. Another indictment was found against one

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II, 489. 491.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II, p. 515.

‡ Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., p. 542.

Joseph Castleton, for volunteering the opinion that His Excellency was "a damn^d Rogue & villain and that there was not a worse Rogue & villain in the world." Castleton plead guilty, and was sentenced to stand in the pillory, on the public parade of Edenton, for two hours, and to beg pardon, on his knees, for the offence.* With the terms of this judgment he afterwards complied, and was thereupon liberated and sent on his way—a less talkative, if not a wiser, man.

In the year 1724, Chief Justice Gale visited England, for the purpose of preferring charges against the Governor, who, it was alleged, had hindered him in the exercise of his judicial duties and threatened his life. As the unanimous verdict of history places the character of the Chief Justice beyond reproach, the statements, concerning Burrington's personal violence, were unquestionably true, though the official administration of the latter, even at the time of his removal, received the endorsement of the Assembly. From the depositions presented by Gale, it appeared that, soon after reaching North Carolina, the Governor had given out repeated threats against him, saying that he would slit his nose, crop his ears, and lay him in irons; that afterwards he had insulted him in open court, and furthermore attempted to enter his house, "but finding he could not break open the door, he broke the window all to pieces, cursing and threatening him in a grievous manner, swearing a great many oaths, that he would lay him by the heels, nay would have him by the throat, speedily, and burn his house or blow it up with gun-powder."† As might be supposed, these charges—substantiated, as

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., pp. 526, 546.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., pp. 559, 560, 561.

they were, by seven members of the Provincial Council—were considered by the Proprietors just cause for the removal of Burrington. He was accordingly displaced, and succeeded by Sir Richard Everard, of Much Waltham, Essex, an English baronet, who took the oath of office on the 17th of July, 1725.* Burrington was then absent, on a visit to South Carolina and the Cape Fear; and, on the 3rd of April, had appointed Edward Moseley to administer the affairs of State until his return.†

The Colonial Assembly met, shortly after Everard's arrival, at Edenton. In an address, forwarded by the members of that body to the Lords Proprietors, they refer to the "great happiness which the Province lately enjoy'd," under Burrington, and the inconvenience caused by "the Sudden & Unexpected Change which had been made thro' the many false & malicious Calumnies raised against that gentleman by Persons of the most Vile Characters as well as Desperate fortunes." The address further enlarges on "his Carryage & behaviour being very Affable & courteous, his Justice very Exemplary & his care and Industry to promote the Interest & welfare of the Province very Eminent & Conspicuous."‡ Two of the members, who aided in drafting this paper, were Edmund Porter and John Baptista Ashe; but when their affable and courteous friend was restored to them, a few years later, it was not long before they, too, incurred the old potentate's enmity, and were denounced as ungrateful villains, who strove, by false representations, to bring his administration under the King's displeasure.

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., pp. 559, 566.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., p. 563.

‡ Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., p. 577.

The next episode, in which we see our hero recorded, is a controversy between Governor Everard and the Rev. Thomas Bailey, a missionary to whom Sir Richard had denied the use of the public house of worship, in Edenton. It was through his attachment for the preceding Governor that the parson had fallen into disfavor with Everard; so, upon hearing of his friend's predicament, Burrington aided him in collecting a congregation, which broke in the door of the Court House, where the reverend gentlemen then held services and gave the people a sermon.*

In denouncing his opponents, Burrington's statements are, at times, too extravagant to be considered, while, on other occasions, we find him pouring forth his abuse on those who richly deserve it. He was never actuated by motives of policy. As Williamson expresses it, "Whether he was guided by irregular passions, or by the honest contempt for villains, he conducted himself with such a want of prudence as to increase the number of his enemies."† From his attack on the Gale residence, it has already been seen that he was not a disciple of Lord Coke, imbued with the doctrine that "a man's house is his castle," or, if so, considered it a castle to which he was at liberty to lay siege, whenever so disposed; and soon we find him, in company with the elder Cornelius Harnett, paying the compliments of the season to Governor Everard in like manner. "I want satisfaction of you, therefore come out and give it to me," he called to Sir Richard; and, upon the non-appearance of that gentleman, proceeded to vent his wrath in a diversified and well-chosen collection of profanity, among

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., pp. 579, 604, 624.

† Williamson's History of North Carolina, Vol. II., p. 33.

other things characterizing him as a calf's head, noodle, and an ape, who was no more fit to be Governor than Sancho Panza. This last opinion, says a modern writer, was also entertained by better men than George Burrington. After relieving his feelings in the manner just described, the exasperated ex-governor next turned his attention to Thomas Parris—a native of Essex, as was Everard—and, with an oath, inquired if all of his countrymen were such fools. For the violence displayed on this occasion, bills of indictment were found against Burrington, and prosecuted by William Little, Attorney General of the Colony, with whom he afterwards became reconciled and appointed Chief Justice, during his second term as Governor. Similar bills were also presented against him for attacking the houses of two other colonists,—to one of whom he also sent a challenge, and swore that he would run the other through the body with his sword. Failing to appear, in answer to these charges, the cases were continued for several terms of court, and finally brought to a close by entry of *nolle prosequi*, as Burrington left Edenton shortly thereafter.*

Notwithstanding Burrington's rough exterior, he seems to have been a man of education; and the sale of his books, mentioned in a letter hereafter quoted, shows that he was not unprovided with literature at a time when libraries were few and scattered. His orthography, it is true, would horrify a modern pedagogue: but this weakness was not peculiar to himself; for, up to the nineteenth century, uniform spelling was an undiscovered art. Some knowledge, too, of the literary productions then in existence, is shown by his familiarity with the great satire of Cervantes, from which he drew

*Col. Records of N. C., Vol. II., pp. 647, *et seq.*, 817.

Everard's counterpart, when he compared him with Don Quixote's trusty esquire.

As to religion, it has been said that Burrington was a Churchman in theory, though not in practice.* The latter portion of this statement, at least, is safe from contradiction by those who have studied his character, for he was far from a model of Christian piety; and, when smitten on one cheek, was not likely to turn the other. In fact, he had a fond preference for smiting first, which was usually indulged to his heart's content.

In the course of a few years, the proprietary rights, held by English noblemen in Carolina, with the exception of Earl Granville's estate, were surrendered to the Crown, whereby the colony again became a royal dominion. This afforded Burrington another opportunity to exercise his power, through influential friends at Court, —notably the Duke of Newcastle,—in again obtaining control of the provincial government. Chief Justice Gale, and others of equal prominence, took steps to prevent his appointment, but without avail. His commission, as Royal Governor, was issued on January 15th, 1730. He reached Edenton on the 25th of February, 1731, and took the oath of office on the day of his arrival.†

A glance at the list of exploits, recorded in this sketch, naturally leads one to believe that Burrington was devoid of executive ability, but such was not the case.

“ When civil dudgeon first grew high,
And men fell out, they knew not why;
When foul words, jealousies, and fears,
Set folks together by the ears,”

he was in his native element, with a vocabulary of billingsgate as inexhaustible in volume as it was ludicrous

* Church History of North Carolina, p. 103.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 66, 142, 211.

in character. And again, when decked in his war-paint, the turbulent old gentleman would sometimes startle his neighborhood in a manner most unbecoming a chief magistrate, who was commissioned to enforce the law. But, in the consideration of measures for the development of the Colony, and particularly in carrying them out, he displayed sound judgment and even keen foresight. One of his chief follies was the deep-rooted delusion that no one could oppose him through proper motives. In the words of a well-posted historian of recent times, "He could tolerate no opinion that was not in accord with his own, and deemed every one a personal enemy, if not a villain, who differed with him."* Yet, with all his faults and eccentricities, there was no one who more closely studied or better understood the character of the colonists. To the Lords of Trade and Plantations, he wrote: "The Inhabitants of North Carolina are not Industrious, but subtle and crafty to admiration: allways behaved insolently to their Governours; some they have Imprisoned, drove others out of the Country, at other times sett up two or three supported by Men under Arms. All the Governours that ever were in this Province lived in fear of the People (except myself) and dreaded their Assemblies. The People are neither to be cajoled or outwitted; whenever a Governour attempts to effect anything by these means, he will lose his Labour and show his Ignorance."†

Among other complaints against Burrington, was one charging him with having had a poor man and his family, the alleged tenants of John Porter, driven out of doors, under distressing circumstances, and then causing

* Saunders' prefatory notes to Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 2.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 338.

their dwelling to be burned to the ground.* His reply to the accusation, (in which he claimed the land as his own), is worthy of reproduction; for, in addition to giving his side of the controversy, it serves to throw some light on the demeanor exhibited by the early inhabitants toward his official predecessors. Referring to the charge, he says: "During the time I remained at Cape Fear, word was sent me that M^r John Porter would raise a logg house as an affront to me on my Land, upon which I gave him notice that if he did I should cause it to be fired. Some time after I was at that place, and finding a logg House of five unbarked green pine logs in height, without either Chimney, plaistring, or other labour used in building Houses, I ordered my Negroes to fire the covering to this House or Hog sty. The loggs being quite green would not burn. It is a very common Practice for the People in this Province to burn their Houses, as being a cheaper way than pulling them down. But what struck most upon me in the Affair of this Logg House was the fate of a former Governour, who was also one of the Lords Proprietors at the same time. I mean Seth Southwell Esq^r, who being surprized on his own Plantation and clapt into a Logg House by the late M^r Pollock and others, was there kept Prisoner until he renounced the Government and took and subscribed a strange oath, too long to be here inserted. It is not unlikely but some People in this Country might have the same intentions to me, if I would have suffered the Logg House to have remained covered."† Judging from the unpleasant experience, here related, of Mr. Southwell—or Sothel, as we more often

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., 362.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 618.

find it written—it would appear that, for once in his life, Urnstone, the missionary, was guilty of telling the truth, when, in 1717, he wrote home, to England, that the colonists cared no more for a Lord Proprietor than for a “ballad-singer.” More than one hundred years later, the historian Bancroft summed up the whole matter, with reference to North Carolina, in these words: “Its inhabitants were restless and turbulent in their imperfect submission to a government imposed on them from abroad; the administration of the Colony was firm, humane, and tranquil, when they were left to take care of themselves. Any government but one of their own institution was oppressive.” *

Despite the grave charges, which were the cause of Burrington's removal, in 1725, his second appointment, in 1730, was hailed with general manifestations of approval throughout the Colony, notwithstanding the fact that strenuous efforts had been made, by some, to prevent his return to power. The Grand Jury, for the whole Province, framed an address of thanks to the King, for the thoughtfulness, displayed by him, in the selection of their former Governor, and were especially complimentary to Burrington, for the generous example he had set, in forgetting all past differences, of a personal character.† The members of the Assembly, also, in a document of the same nature, were equally as warm in their professions. “We are in duty bound,” they say, “to acknowledge as a particular mark of your Indulgence the placing over us His Excellency George Burrington Esq^r Captain General and Commander in Chief of this your Province, a Person who by his Behaviour

*Bancroft's History of the United States (1837), Vol. II., p. 158.

†Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 134.

during the time he governed this Province for the Lords Proprietors rendred himself very agreeable to the People by the Great Care he then shewed in his due Administration of Justice and in promoting the wellfare of this Province." * Governor Burrington was not backward in his acknowledgements, but declared that their demeanor to him had been so full of respect that he was at loss for words to express the esteem and regard he had for persons of such great worth and excellent qualifications.† But this love feast was of short duration. The House of Burgesses, or Assembly, passed a resolution, requesting that a proclamation be issued, for the suppression of an evil from which the people suffered,—that of charging exorbitant fees by public officials. His Excellency replied that, whoever the person might be who wrote this resolution, he was doubtless guilty of such abuses himself; and that his ruse brought to mind the stratagem of a thief, who would hide himself in a house, for the purpose of robbery, and then set it on fire to escape in the smoke. He further observed that he had, in person, examined the practices in the adjoining Province of Virginia, and that there the fees charged were even more beneficial, to officers of the government, than in North Carolina. The Burgesses did not seem to think the usages of a sister colony germane to the difficulty, but relied on the Royal Charter, by which the inhabitants of Carolina were vested with the rights of British subjects. The resolution, they declared, was not the work of any one member, but expressed the sentiment of their entire House, and therefore the Governor's uncomplimentary simile was a great indignity

*Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 138.

†Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 259.

to that body, as a whole.* It is needless to say that an agreement was never reached. In the beginning, Burrington had been "at loss for words" to express his *esteem* and *regard* for the members of the Assembly, but was never known to experience such inconvenience in expressing his *anger*, and so the breach remained unhealed, until finally he was constrained to put an end to their deliberations—or "divisions, heats, and indecencies," to use his phrase—by prorogation, on the 17th of May, 1731.†

As has already been noted, Burrington was by no means lacking in his endeavors for the improvement of the Colony. Regardless, alike, of wintry blasts and the fierce heat of summer, he was ever active and untiring. Indeed, it is not overdrawing the truth to say that it was beyond the power of human endurance to toil more incessantly and undergo more personal sacrifices, in the development of its resources, than he did. It was his custom to visit the localities where new settlements were made, and inspect personally the public thoroughfares and bridges, seeing to it that they were kept in proper repair by the magistrates charged with that duty. In a communication to Lord Carteret, the Palatine, or Senior Proprietor, of Carolina, he states that on several occasions, he narrowly escaped starvation, and had, more than once, come near being drowned. To him, more than to any other person, was due the upbuilding of the Cape Fear region, which afterwards became the most important locality in the Colony. With his private means he purchased over ten thousand acres there, which brought him little or no revenue in after years, and

*Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 262, 265, 267, 270, 271, 272.

†Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 284.

offered valuable inducements to persons who contemplated removing to that neighborhood. He pushed to completion a highway, stretching a hundred miles across the country, from Neuse River to the lower settlements: and the construction of another, still greater in length, running from the Virginia boundary to the banks of the Cape Fear, was undertaken at his instance. He discovered, and marked out the channel of the last named water-course, and of Topsail Inlet; and sounded and explored many other rivers and harbors, theretofore comparatively unknown. According to his account, the only reward he ever received was a vote of thanks from the House of Burgesses.* Nor are we left to rely upon the Governor's word for the truth of these assertions. The members of the Assembly gave public utterance to their gratitude, with a promise to make the King sensible of his services.† Stronger still is the language employed, in an address to Governor Johnston (after Burrington's permanent retirement), by inhabitants of the precincts of Edgecombe and Bertie, in 1735. They express the belief that no man living could have taken more pains, or undergone greater fatigue, to acquaint himself with the condition of the Province; that he had repeatedly made journeys into the back-woods, on foot, often accompanied by only one man. Pinched with hunger and in danger of perishing, he had been compelled, in one instance, to subsist on a single biscuit for three days. On some occasions he would come among the settlers, several hundred miles from home, with the clothing torn from his body, and, at other times, would

*Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 29, 135, 287, 288, 434, 435, 436, 577, 617.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 262.

carry considerable sums of money with him, for distribution among the poorer inhabitants, to better enable them to settle the upper country.* Even the lordly Virginian, Colonel Byrd of Westover,—who never mentioned his neighbors save in ridicule—could not withhold a letter of congratulation, which stands, however, more as an unintentional tribute to the people of North Carolina than the compliment to their Governor, for which it was meant. He wrote, that what knowledge he had of the province inclined him to fear that it would take a pretty deal of trouble to bring it into order, and that a man of less spirit than Burrington would never be able to do so; for people, accustomed to live without law or gospel, felt great reluctance in submitting to either. North Carolina, he said, was a very happy country, where a livelihood could be had with less labor than in any other part of the world. With Burrington he deplored the stubbornness of the Assembly at Edenton, and closed by declaring that if the Governor succeeded in reducing to order such anarchy and chaos, a statue ought to be erected in his honor; or, which was perhaps better, he would deserve to have his salary doubled.†

In 1732, Governor Burrington estimated that the white race in North Carolina would aggregate thirty thousand, with about six thousand negroes and less than eight hundred Indians. The militia, he said, contained about five thousand, with an additional thousand to be enrolled later on.‡

In his admirable oration, on Early Men and Times of the Cape Fear, delivered before the literary societies of

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. IV., p. 19.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 194.

‡ Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 433.

the University of North Carolina, in 1855, the Honorable George Davis states that about five miles below Brunswick, there is still a small stream, known as Governor's Creek, which takes that name from its former proprietor. Burrington's Cape Fear estate, Stag Park, had been so called as early as 1664, by explorers from Barbadoes. In 1754, he mortgaged it to Samuel Strudwick, of London, (ancestor of the Strudwick family of North Carolina), and the deed is now recorded in the archives of New Hanover County, at Wilmington. Strudwick, it would seem, afterwards deposited the title with Lieutenant-General John Guise to secure the payment of a debt. When Guise gave a discharge for the same, in 1761, he was joined in the quit-claim by LIEUTENANT GEORGE BURRINGTON, of the British Army, the Governor's sole legatee, who thereby made a conveyance of the right of redemption which had been inherited from his father.*

Cape Fear, itself, was discovered and christened with that suggestive name by the heroic Sir Richard Grenville, who came near being shipwrecked in its vicinity during the year 1585.†

Notwithstanding the gratitude professed for Governor Burrington, in the addresses of the Assembly, etc., already quoted, there never was a time when he was without enemies. The people appreciated the value of his progressive and enterprising spirit, in the post he occupied; but his intolerant disposition, and violent conduct when opposed, however honest the motives of those who differed with him, rendered no man safe who dared to thwart his designs. Among the most active opponents

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. VI., pp. 578, 579, 580; Address of Hon. George Davis, at University of North Carolina, 1855.

† Hakluyt's Voyages (1810 reprint), Vol. III., p. 309.

of his second administration were Nathaniel Rice, John Baptista Ashe, Edmund Porter, and John Montgomery. Of these, the first three were members of the Council, former friends of the Governor, but now enemies of long standing. In addition to his public disputes, Ashe had quarrelled with Burrington over the ownership of two mares, which they both claimed, and, in consequence of charges preferred by him, was imprisoned for libel, though afterwards released, on a writ of *habeas corpus*, by Chief Justice Little.* Montgomery, who was Attorney General of the Colony, well might have thought:—

“ Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love,
But why did you kick me down stairs? ”——

for his complaint is to the effect that, after attacking him with a chair, the Governor had thrown him to the floor and punched him in such a manner, with his knee, that he would probably have been killed, or seriously injured, had not bystanders interposed. After the assault, Montgomery asked for a license to return to England, which Burrington said he could not grant, until after the Council met, but would then give him a license to go to the Devil, if he desired it; and, as if by way of facilitating his acceptance of this offer, challenged him to cross the Virginia boundary where their difficulty could be privately settled, according to the code duello.† Montgomery, however, was not to be drawn out in this manner, though he was afterwards charged with having engaged in a conspiracy, with Chief Justice Smith and Secretary Rice, to murder the Governor. According to

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 377, 379, 616 and 617; see also, p. 385, *et seq.*

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 474.

Burrington's declaration, this trio attempted to kill him with pistols, but the design was frustrated by some courageous friends, who unexpectedly came to his assistance. He further states that indictments were found against the three offenders, who thereupon fled to Virginia, and remained concealed in that Province until after the arrival of Governor Johnston, who ordered the prosecution to drop, and "immediately distinguished the assassins by his favours, every one being placed in some employment."* In commenting on the statements, here quoted, amazement has well been expressed that Governor Burrington escaped at all—"If a tithe of what his enemies said about Burrington be true, the wonder is that he got away from the colony alive, and not that an attempt was made to kill him."†

It was in the Spring of 1733 that Gabriel Johnston received the King's commission as Governor. Johnston was a highly educated Scotch gentleman, connected with the historic Annandale family of that name, and had, before coming to America, been Professor of Oriental Languages in the University of St. Andrews. He was sworn before the Provincial Council of North Carolina, at Brunswick, in the new Cape Fear settlement, on the 2nd of November, 1734.‡ This appointment, strange to say, was taken with good grace by Burrington. He had received intimations of the prospective change, and grew impatient under the delay. To the Duke of Newcastle, he wrote:—"Haveing lived in this Province some years without receiving any money from the King, or Country, was constrained to sell not only my household goods, but even linnen, plate, and Books, and mortgage

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. IV., p. 165.

† Saunders' prefatory notes to Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. xi.

‡ Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 368, 438, 534; Vol. IV., p. 1.

my Lands and stocks. The many sicknesses that seized me, and their long continuance, have greatly impaired my constitution and substance. My affairs and health being in a bad condition, I humbly desire my Lord Duke will be pleased to obtain His Majesties leave for my return to England." And later he says:—"I daily expect the Kings leave for my return to England; when it arrives, shall make haste to London. Hope to inform my Lords of Trade of all that is necessary for his Majesties Service in N. Carolina." *

A short while before these two dispatches were written, Burrington had temporarily absented himself from the Province, for the purpose of visiting South Carolina, when the duties of his office devolved upon Nathaniel Rice, senior member of the Council. He soon returned, however, and was present with the General Assembly, on the 13th of November, 1734, when the proceedings of that body were brought to a close by the proclamation announcing Governor Johnston's arrival.†

This terminated Burrington's political career in North Carolina. The length of his public service, in England and America together, may be estimated by the opening phrase of a letter, dated November 15th, 1732, two years, almost to the very day, previous to his retirement, on the 13th November, 1734. He writes:—"I have served the crown in every reign since the Abdication of King James, & always was allowed to behave as became a Man of Honour, and the Family whose name I bear; their Services at the Revolution and during the life of the late King William of glorious memory I hope are not yet in Oblivion." ‡ The "abdication" of King

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 625, 630.

† Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., pp. 633, 641, 643; see also Saunders' prefatory notes to that volume, pp. iii, iv.

‡ Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. 375.

James occurred in 1688. The reign of his immediate successor, William of Orange, ended in 1702. So Burrington must have entered the royal service as early as the latter date, which was about twenty years before he came to America.

When he received his second appointment, in 1730, the King's warrant was given Burrington for a salary of seven hundred pounds, per annum, to be paid out of quit-rents in the Colony. But, to his sorrow, he soon discovered that getting the warrant was one thing, and getting the money was another; for, during the whole time he remained in office, the Assembly made no provision whatever for collecting the fund specified. But nothing daunted, by this neglect, the Governor pursued his policy, regardless of appropriations; and, as a consequence, was greatly impoverished at the time of his final return to Great Britain. Some months thereafter, he petitioned the King for the payment of his salary, and for re-imbursement of the expenses incurred while having surveys and drafts made of the rivers and harbors of the province.* Had he stopped with this, the historian Saunders observes, he might have succeeded; but, taking advantage of the opportunity to again get a fling at his enemies, he prayed an investigation of his official conduct, with a view of exonerating himself, which caused the petition, by advice of the Privy Council, to be adjudged irregular and dismissed.† The aggregate amount due on his salary, alone, was between two and three thousand pounds. Added to this were large sums, expended from his private means, in carrying out the royal instructions for having surveys made of different

* Col. Records of N. C., Vol. IV., pp. 164, 168.

† Saunders' prefatory notes to Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III, pp. x, xi.

portions of the colony, both by land and water. Whatever may have been the propriety, from a legal standpoint, in rejecting his petition, no technical defect in that document could relieve the moral obligation to refund all proper expenditures, and pay the salary stipulated. It is small wonder that Burrington considered himself badly treated.

In addition to valuable data contained in the original records, compiled by the Honorable William L. Saunders, from which source this sketch is almost entirely drawn, we are also indebted to the prefatory notes, which emanate from the pen of that author, for the most accurate estimate yet given of Governor Burrington's character and ability: "His official papers relating to the province, those at least unconnected with his quarrels, are well written and show an intimate knowledge of the country and the measures best adapted to promote its development. Considered alone, indeed, they would present him as an active, intelligent, progressive ruler. But they cannot be considered alone, and he stands out, therefore, as a man of ability, but utterly disqualified by grievous faults for the position he occupied. And yet he was a wiser ruler than his predecessor, Everard, and possessed no more faults; he was, too, to say the least, as wise as his successor, Gabriel Johnston, and no more arbitrary. Certain it is, too, that the province under his administration continued to flourish and greatly prosper, both in wealth and population. It may be that Burrington was hampered by his instructions from the Crown, and that no Governor could have carried them out and kept the peace with a people who, as he said, were subtle and crafty to admiration, who could neither be outwitted nor cajoled, who always behaved insolently

to their Governors, who maintained that their money could not be taken from them save by appropriations made by their own House of Assembly, a body that had always usurped more power than they ought to be allowed; with a people, in a word, who well knew their rights and dared to assert them to the full." * With this should be considered the testimony of Williamson, who, after dwelling at some length on his errors and follies, says: "He is not charged, nor was he chargeable, with fraud or corruption; for he despised rogues, whether they were small or great. Nor could he be suspected of cunning, a vice that is more dangerous, because it personates a virtue; but he sailed without ballast." † And still another tribute, also recognizing his faults, portrays him as, "Open, frank, bold, spirited, and generous; but also weak, imprudent, dissipated and reckless. A social and agreeable companion, and a staunch friend; but careless of his personal dignity, and regardless of law or authority." ‡

In preparing this narrative, care has been taken to present, in an impartial manner, the facts related; and now, by adding a few words to the passages just quoted, there is no intention to attempt a palliation of one man's sins by comparison with those of others. But as a plea for consistency with persons who are too much blinded, by the shortcomings of Governor Burrington, to recognize his good qualities—(as the writer of this sketch acknowledges himself to have been, heretofore),—it is well to call attention to the fact that far greater men have been marked no less conspicuously by the faults

* Saunders' prefatory notes to Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. xi.

† Williamson's History of North Carolina, Vol. II., p. 14.

‡ Address of Hon. George Davis, at University of N. C., 1855.

for which he was noted. Indeed, it may not be presumption to cast our eyes so high as the renowned ANDREW JACKSON,—in war, the peer of the bravest, and regarded by many as the embodiment of all that is wise in statesmanship. Our hearts beat high with pride at the splendid military achievements of the Hero of New Orleans; and we admire, in a no less degree, the iron will, which bore down all opposition to his civil policy. Yet the faithful biographer of “Old Hickory” is forced to record him as “surpassing all known men in the fluency and chain-shot force and complication of his oaths.” And, furthermore, we are told that he was “too quick to believe evil of one who stood to him in the relation of competitor and rival.” Nor did Jackson fall below Burrington’s mark in the violence of his personal conduct. In perusing his biography, we find him, on one occasion, armed with a large bludgeon and brace of pistols, with which to chastise an enemy in a public tavern; again, he is seen horse-whipping a political opponent, or swearing by the Eternal that he will crop the ears of a third offender, in the event of further provocation, while a relation of his countless other quarrels—to say nothing of duels—would consume pages. If the overshadowing genius, of the one, counterbalanced these imperfections, we should not, while contemplating similar faults, in the other, lose sight of valuable services rendered in an humbler sphere.

The ultimate fate of Governor Burrington has been a source of much perplexity to students of North Carolina history, owing to the conflicting statements of different writers. Wheeler, with some variation therefrom, follows the lead of Williamson, who confuses his temporary absence, in April, 1734, with his permanent retire-

ment, from office, in the Fall of that year. The first named author, after mentioning his departure from America, also says that he died "soon after," and then an account is given of his death.* Thus both historians are made liable to the charge of inaccuracy: for, as has already been noted, Burrington was with the Colonial Assembly as late as November, 1734; and it will soon be seen that his death occurred many years thereafter, in February, 1759. He was interred in the Parish of St. John the Evangelist, Westminster.†

But, returning to North Carolina authorities, it should be remembered that Dr. Williamson, upon whom Wheeler evidently relies, does not state that Burrington died soon after he reached England. The version of Williamson is that, finding himself at loggerheads with adverse factions, the Governor "retired from the helm," to which is added—erroneously, however,—by way of an explanatory note, "April, 1734." Then beginning an entirely new sentence (which should be a paragraph), he goes on to give the following account of his death: "This imprudent and eccentric man, after his return to London, sold a tract of land that he had taken up, near the Haw Fields in Carolina. Having money in his pocket on the following night, and rioting in his usual manner, he fell a sacrifice to his folly. He was found murdered the next morning, in the Bird Cage walk, in a corner of Saint James' Park."‡

* Wheeler's History of North Carolina, part I., p. 42.

† When Burrington made his will, 1750, he resided in the Parish of St. Martin Ludgate; but, by the probate thereof, March 23, 1759, it appears that, at the time of his death, he was a resident of the Parish of St. John the Evangelist. For will, etc., see Col. Records of N. C., Vol. VI., pp. 18, 19, 277.

‡ Williamson's History of North Carolina, Vol. II., p. 35, and note.

Referring to the English newspapers of that day, we find more accurate notices, in connection with this mysterious affair, which have heretofore escaped the scrutiny of historians.

The following is an extract from the *Public Advertiser*, for Friday, February 23d, 1759:—"Yesterday was taken out of the Canal in St. James's Park, the Body of an elderly Man well dressed. His Pockets were turn'd inside out, and his Stick in his Hand, which was clinched and bruised."

The *Gazeteer and Daily Advertiser*, of the same date, says:—"Yesterday a man genteely drest was taken out of the Canal in St. James's Park, and it is supposed that he has been drowned some days."

The *London Evening Post*, February 24th to February 27th:—"The Person found drowned in the Canal in St. James's Park last Week, was George Burrington, Esq; who was Governor of the Province of Carolina in the last Spanish War, and was known and respected by the Gentlemen of that Province."

The *Whitehall Evening Post*, February 22nd to February 24th:—"Thursday Morning an elderly Gentleman was found floating in the Canal in St. James's Park; in his Pocket was found a Letter from his Son, who is an Officer in the Army now abroad, and was known by some Gentlemen who saw him taken out."

The last named paper, February 24th to February 27th, also states:—"The Person found drown'd in the Canal in St. James's Park last Week, was —— Burrington, Esq; who was Governor of the Province of Carolina in the last Spanish War."

So ended the eventful career outlined in these pages. The manner of Burrington's death could hardly have

been accidental or suicidal, for there were evidences of robbery. And yet, it is strange that no serious wounds were noticeable on his person. In view of this fact, the most tenable conjecture will probably lead us to the conclusion that he was set upon by garroters, who first rendered him insensible by strangulation and then resorted to the canal. Thus pinioned from behind, the victim would be powerless, and it was not necessary for the robbers to disarm him of the cane, which he so desperately clasped as to retain even in death. Nearly all that has been written in history, concerning him, portrays an individual much given to the use of intoxicating liquors, which may be true: for the circumstances of his murder seem to indicate that he had been carousing with friends; and the personal demeanor, in itself, exhibited on other occasions heretofore mentioned, is further corroborative of such assertions. Yet one of the writers, to whom reference has been made, thoughtfully observes that "the seemingly respectful consideration, given to him and to his opinions by the Board of Trade after his return to England, is by no means consistent with the theory that he was a mere drunken brawler."* Another fact is also worthy of note in considering this phase of his character: that, during his administrations in North Carolina, he was surrounded by enemies, who never lost an opportunity to seize upon, if not exaggerate, every act of impropriety on his part; and still, in all of these complaints, which cover scores of pages, no mention is made of his dissolute habits. Or, to be more accurate, the writer will state that, if such charge does exist, it has escaped his observation, in making a careful examination of the records. And

* Saunders' prefatory notes to Col. Records of N. C., Vol. III., p. xi.

GOVERNOR
GEORGE BURRINGTON,

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it should furthermore be borne in mind that if, in fact, he was addicted to intemperance, he was not alone, for he lived in a licentious age. "His virtues were his own; and his vices were but too common in the times in which he lived," is the conclusion of an impartial authority whom we have also had occasion to quote.*

Like some quaint specimen of statuary, cast in a mould which is afterwards destroyed, George Burrington can never be duplicated. And, for the "peace and dignity" of North Carolina, in the present advanced state of civilization, it is fortunate that such rulers no longer hold sway. But in a colony, which is peopled with every class of society from its mother country, subjected to the warfare of hostile savages, and abounding in unexplored lands, something more than a political economist is required to shape its destiny. The philosophy of Locke in planning a model government of Carolina, went for naught. It was a hardier type, albeit less refined, which opened to navigation the water-ways of the province, developed its resources, and laid for it the foundation of future greatness.

Such was Burrington. Could we draw aside the curtain of time and view him, as he stalked up the streets of Edenton, or beat through unbroken forests and miasmous pocosons to the sand-bars of Cape Fear, his likeness would doubtless be sought in vain, save on the canvas of poetic genius.—

"On his dark face, a scorching plume,
And toil, had done the work of time,
Roughened the brow, the temples bared,
And sable hairs with silver shared;
Yet left—what age alone could tame—
The lip of pride, the eye of flame;

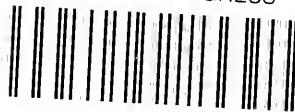
* Address of Hon. George Davis, at University of N. C., 1855.

The full-drawn lip, that upward curled,
 The eye, that seemed to scorn the world.
 That lip had terror never blenched ;
 Ne'er in that eye had tear-drop quenched
 The flash, severe, of swarthy glow,
 That mocked at pain, and knew not woe."

Far from the land of his labors and turmoils the old Governor is now laid at rest. Never will that slumber be broken by political animosity or the fiercer discords of private life that marred his earthly career.

" He died, and left the world behind ;
 His once wild heart is cold ;
 His once keen eye is quelled and blind ;
 What more?—His tale is told."

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